

USAID | OTI | CREA | CCSSP

**Cuban Civil Society Support Program
(CCSSP)**

Contract Number DOT-I-00-03-00009-00
Task Order No. 4

Monthly Report

September 2009

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1. Country Situation Update

International

- Juanes' *Concierto por la Paz* takes place amid controversy: Colombian artist, Juanes along with 15 other artists held a concert for peace in Havana on September 20. An estimated record breaking crowd of 1.15 million people gathered at the Plaza de la Revolucion. Some Cuban-Americans opposed the concert and accused performers of supporting the Castro regime, while others considered it a chance for Cubans to experience something new. During the final moments of the concert, Juanes made mention of young independent artists, naming Aldeanos and Silvito "El Libre," and encouraging them in their plight for freedom of expression, and shouted from the stage "Cuba libre! Cuba libre!," an unexpected move on his part. The Cuban government has called the event a "victory" and proof they did not manipulate any aspects of the concert, as many had feared; however reports from an independent journalist from Hablemos Press and dissident communities on the island stated that as many as 60 dissidents and human rights activists were either warned, threatened, or put under house arrest to prevent them from attending the concert.
- China awards \$600 million in credits to Cuba: China recently awarded Cuba, its long time ally, \$600 million in credits and assistance. China's continued interest in Cuba despite its poor repayment record and lack of resources lies in two main issues: Cuba's political support for China reclaiming Tibet and Taiwan, and economic positioning in key sectors to prepare for a market opening in Cuba. However, analysts suggest that China will only continue such engagement as long as ties with Cuba do not affect China's lucrative economic relationship with the US.
- US-Cuba considering direct mail services: Country representatives for both the US and Cuba sat down for talks aimed at re-establishing direct mail service after a week of recriminations over the extension of the trade embargo. President Obama sees the talks as a "potential avenue to improve communication," a positive outlook after harsh rhetoric from Cuba regarding the embargo. Many had hoped the small concessions by the US would eventually lead to the two countries relating differently to each other. However, few if any changes have taken place in Cuba, while Obama has many pressing issues at home and abroad, and the country appears to be on the USG's backburner for now.

Local News

- Raul Castro calls again for a massive public debate on the state of things: Raul Castro called for another 45 days of debate where Cubans could analyze some of their problems, define production increases, savings and efficiency measures, as well as strengthen the fight against corruption. The meetings will be held through October 15 in various state-run locations with Raul Castro's last two speeches as "study material." This debate process, unlike previous ones, has called for an honest, open and valiant debate respecting differences of opinion and has set specific topics for discussion such as "rebuilding socialism" and creating a "new model of socialism." Previous debates raised many expectations yet yielded little to no results. Although hopeful, even regime supporters do not believe that the current process will be any different.
- Vice President and historic Revolutionary leader Juan Almeida passes away: Cuban revolutionary and government leader, Juan Almeida passed away this month. Almeida was an Afro-Cuban with close ties to Castro, a sign of Afro-Cuban's ability to access power in the Castro regime. Almeida's death is a reminder of the aging Cuban leadership (the youngest is 72) and the lack of suitable successors to the Castro regime.

2. Programmatic Highlights and Major Activities

Key Programmatic Accomplishments

- SJO001: Activities have been finalized and the grant is in the closing process. Staff is currently evaluating the project's implementation and determining future engagement activities as a continuation. One new grant is expected to be submitted for approval in early October as a result.
- SJO007: Grant is in the final stages of implementation and the first episode of the program was released on September 25. Distribution is ongoing during the last week of September and first week of October. The program is being distributed to the target population at local events. A new grant will be submitted in October for approval to continue production and create a second episode.
- SJO008: Implementation continues and grantee has been informed that beneficiaries found innovative ways to include and disseminate new content formats.
- SJO009: A full debriefing was held during the second week of September and three new grant ideas targeting distinct and unengaged populations were yellow-lighted and are under development. E-grant submissions will occur in mid-October.
- SJO010: New ideas proposed by the consultant are being analyzed and drafted into grants. Completion of this grant and approval of new ideas is expected in the coming weeks.
- SJO011: Full debriefing was held and a final report was received from the grantee. Staff is evaluating the results and new ideas proposed as a continuation of this activity. Possibly three new grants ideas are expected to be submitted for approval.
- SJO012: Activities have been finalized and the grant is in the process of closing. A number of contacts were identified as a result of this trip for future grant-making.
- SJO015: Workshop was held in September in the Caribbean to discuss targeted population. Representatives from the target population attended the workshop and a full report is expected in the coming weeks.
- SJO016: The leadership module created under this grant will be applied to the existing curriculum starting the first week of October. Material assistance has been delivered as scheduled and final activity reporting is underway. Completion of this grant is expected by early October. An e-grant submission for Phase II is anticipated for early October.
- SJO019: Grant activities continue to be implemented successfully. The technology used has proven effective and target numbers have been exceeded. Troubleshooting of technical issues by the grantee is ongoing and a full report with next steps is expected in October.
- SJO020: The consultant completed the trip to the island and a debriefing was held.
- SJO022: Grant activities are under implementation and coordination with the grantee is underway. This grant has a training-of-trainers component and training materials have been developed. Additionally, a methodology for the first survey has been created.
- SJO023: This activity has been rejected because the NGO determined it was not in their best interest to partner with a USG-funded program.
- SJO024: Grant staff traveled to the island in September to coordinate activities with key actors. A debriefing is expected in early October.
- SJO025: Material assistance was procured and delivered during the first week of September. Training for the core group was carried out in an intensive 3-day workshop. Field implementation by the local team has commenced and preliminary reports are showing success.

- SJO026: A strategic meeting with two consultants was held in San Jose the first week of September to develop a project plan for implementation. The meeting was a success and an activity to engage the targeted population was approved (SJO030) as a result. All activities are complete and the grant is in the process of closing.
- SJO027: Grantee staff is scheduled to travel to Costa Rica at the end of September to hold a strategic planning session. The expected results of the session will be to design civic education tools, learn from the grantee's experience and strengthen civic leaders in Cuba.
- SJO028 and SJO029: Both grants were approved during the last week of August. Coordination and signature of the grant agreement is underway.
- SJO030: Grantee staff traveled to San Jose for a debriefing prior to their two-week trip to the island scheduled for early October.
- SJO031: Grantee staff traveled to San Jose the last week of September for a strategic planning session to determine the next steps for developing a community engagement initiative.

Program Operations

- Outreach to regional NGOs and INGOs: Program staff is evaluating potential grantees from Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and Panama.
- Grants cleared to date: **31** (19 in process, 1 closed, 5 completed, 5 rejected, 1 cancelled)

Status Count				
Pending	Cleared	Completed	Closed	Cancelled / Rejected
4	19	5	1	1 / 8* *5 had been cleared

CLEARED		
1	SJO007	\$ 94,898
2	SJO008	\$ 53,292
3	SJO009	\$ 21,998
4	SJO010	\$ 93,910
5	SJO011	\$ 43,644
6	SJO012	\$ 28,984
7	SJO015	\$ 10,210
8	SJO016	\$ 83,962
9	SJO019	\$ 97,968
10	SJO020	\$ 13,553
11	SJO022	\$ 93,180
12	SJO024	\$ 18,220
13	SJO025	\$ 87,959
14	SJO026	\$ 5,922
15	SJO027	\$ 6,404
16	SJO028	\$ 95,626
17	SJO029	\$ 94,794
18	SJO030	\$ 24,316

CLEARED		
19	SJO031	\$ 5,634
Subtotal:		\$ 974,474

CLOSED		
1	SJO003	\$ 17,189
Subtotal:		\$ 17,189

COMPLETED		
1	SJO001	\$ 114,724
2	SJO006	\$ 93,000
3	SJO014	\$ 87,236
4	SJO017	\$ 4,830
5	SJO018	\$ 13,572
Subtotal:		\$ 313,362

PENDING		
1	iSJO003	\$ 70,000
2	iSJO005	\$ 94,000
3	iSJO012	\$ 77,000
4	iSJO013	\$ 54,000
Subtotal:		\$ 295,000

CANCELLED		
1	SJO013	\$ 65,903.00

REJECTED		
1	iSJO001	
2	iSJO010	
3	iSJO011	
4	SJO002	
5	SJO004	
6	SJO005	
7	SJO021	
8	SJO023	

Administration and Operations

- **Activity Database (ADa):** On-going staff training continues. The Database Manager is participating via email in an OTI effort to develop a web-based Activity Database.
- **Finance:** Finance manager traveled to DC to receive training on a new financial software system which is expected to go live by the end of the year.
- **Procurement:** BIS license average approval time is now approximately 5 weeks. A new exemption was released by the US Department of Commerce; staff is reviewing its applicability to this particular project. Equipment procurement and delivery to the island continue successfully.
- **Human Resources:** Two new Program Assistants have been hired as of September 21st to support the PDOs on administrative tasks and day to day management of grants. A new = driver also was hired.

Information and Communication Technologies

- Technical support and training for staff continues.
- Grantees have been successfully trained and provided with user-ready equipment.

Security

- The Cuban government has announced that it will block VOIP services such as Skype, Yahoo and Google for international calls. This could present a potential security issue for the program because we rely on these tools to communicate with consultants and others on the ground. The Security Manager has performed tests and the services are still functioning normally. We will continue to monitor the situation in the short-term.
- Security protocols were updated to reflect changes in the contact list and tailored to incorporate lessons learned.
- The Security manager held trainings for new staff members on security protocols, and for the new driver on the use of the office vehicle.

3. Budget Information

CLIN	Description	Total	Obligated 2008	Disbursed August 2009	Cumulative Amount
001	Operations	\$ 4,877,599		\$ 113,050.50	\$ 1,698,655.98
002	Fixed Fee Operations	\$ 244,380		\$ 5,652.52	\$ 84,932.81
003	Grants	\$ 10,200,000		\$ 150,469.88	\$ 464,635.52
004	Fixed Fee on Grants	\$ 204,000		\$ 3,009.40	\$ 9,292.71
	TOTAL	\$ 15,535,979	\$ 6,500,000	\$ 272,182.30	\$ 2,257,516.99

4. Problems Encountered: Issues and Proposed Actions

- This month, a second NGO (SJO023) decided it was not in their best interest to participate in our program. Reservations are related to USG funding and the political nature of the program. CREA and the OTI CR continue discussions about how to best approach NGOs to mitigate the risk of losing partners in the future.
- While grant expenditures continue to be below the program’s target grants/operations ratio, in the past two months grant expenditures have increased notably while operations costs have leveled out. Discussions regarding the target grants/operations ratio continue internally within CREA and with OTI to identify means to meet the established target.

5. Upcoming Activities

- CREA/Costa Rica has the following activities planned for October 2009:
 - Continue implementation of grants currently in the pipeline.

- Continue to identify NGOs for grant ideas that are in the works.
- Travel to the island is scheduled for grantee staff of SJO 025, 028, & 030.
- Hold debriefings for travelers for SJO020 & 015.
- Hold strategic planning sessions in Costa Rica for activities: SJO028 & 031.
- Finalize close out process for completed grants and prepare for fiscal year end.
- Develop annual report to be submitted by October 31st.
- Host OTI/CREA strategic planning session from October 21-22.